

06-121

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NOV 16 2007

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

Maureen Bo, Board Member
Puget Sound Alliance for Retired Americans

Statement before the FCC Hearing
November 9, 2007
Seattle, Washington

We need the FCC to strengthen rules against corporate monopolies owning our media, not weaken them.

Americans still care about democracy. A free, diverse media is crucial to democracy. In return for free use of public airways, the media is supposed to serve public interests. We believe that the public interests are threatened by the proposed rule changes.

"The Revolution Shall Not Be Televised," is a nightmare that could happen in the USA. Some of you may remember that indie documentary done by an Irish film crew that just happened to be in Venezuela a few years back at the time the corporate-owned television media joined with right wing forces to overthrow the democratically, constitutionally elected government of Venezuela. Only the right-wing corporate viewpoint was heard on the television stations. There was a media blackout when the President's supporters overthrew the illegal coup d'etat and reinstated the President to power. There was no television coverage because the television station owners who took part in the overthrow didn't want the country to know that President Chavez had so many avid supporters and that the coup had failed.

After the Iraq war scams foisted on us in 2003, what can we expect from big media if it is allowed to get even bigger and swallow up more independent local stations? What could we expect from media that was "embedded with the military" (or as many interpreted that phrase, in bed with White House neo-cons desperate to go to war for corporate profits)?

We need a free, diverse, locally controlled media to bring us all the news and all viewpoints. Do not weaken limitations on media ownership by the proposed rules change. This Administration has done enough damage to our democratic institutions. Let the damage stop here and the mending begin.



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CC: Washington State Senators and Representatives

Name and address of commenter:

(fmr) Hon. Rep. Seth Armstrong
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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

I am a concerned citizen and I reside in Seattle.

Preserving diversity of viewpoints in the media is of critical importance for democracy

Concentrated ownership of the newspapers, TV and radio LIMIT what we learn from them. The owners, AOLTimeWarnerGeneralElectricDisney-WestinghouseNewsCorp have got more customers and increased the stock and the personal wealth of top executives. And hearing from both sides ended when Reagan's Federal Communications Commission repealed the Fairness Doctrine in 1987. It used to require reporters and broadcasters to give us issues of public importance and mandated airtime to the other side. No longer.

91% of the current broadcast come from one view. Economist, July 21, 2007, p. 36. As merger has followed merger, investigation, questioning and reporting have ended because copying the most organized source, the government, has become cheaper. Journalism has been directed to other priorities than "the news we need to know to keep our freedoms." (Moyers) In fact, the media have become America's entertainment instead of presenting the news we need in a democracy to learn the truth about our society and government.

Now the media do few investigations and merely serve as a mighty megaphone for the government. Neither party should want that in a democracy.

No one questions and investigates the accuracy and fairness as they used to before all were owned by the same few corporations.

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FCC Testimony

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

Nov. 9, 2007

06-121

Hello. My name is Breona Gutschmidt, and I am an editor and writer for a small local parenting publication called *ParentMap* newsmagazine. I came to the FCC hearing held in Seattle in 2003, and I'm here again today because I believe that the proposed media ownership rule changes will have negative impacts on families, communities, women, minorities and the health of our vibrant democracy. Today, with this short time, I'd like to talk about localism and one very small media company.

ParentMap newsmagazine was founded by and is owned by a Seattle mother, and is run by a staff of 25 talented local women. *ParentMap* is supported by local advertisers, hires exclusively local freelance writers, covers local events, interviews local leaders in education, early learning and development, children's health experts and advocates, and many others. We tell parents about a wide variety of events all over Western Washington to get families out and doing fun and educational things with their kids, and connect families with the information and resources they need.

We serve our community, including 148,000 readers in 4 counties, and actively work to build community by sponsoring events, hosting lecture series and partnering with some of the amazing research institutions in our area to help disseminate the latest research to parents in our region.

ParentMap, a small business with strong values, is also a great place to work, a place where the line between advertising and edit is clear and the writers and editors can do work they are proud of.

The rule change you have proposed making puts *ParentMap*, and other small, family-owned media outlets, in peril, forcing them to compete with ever growing national and international media conglomerates that do not have the local focus, the community investment and involvement or the careful consideration of children, families and women that companies like *ParentMap* have.

Making this change is a vote against companies who truly have the health of families as their motivation, not the bottom line. A vote against the kind of community building that can be achieved with local media and that simply cannot be achieved by media outlets producing their news thousands of miles away no matter how those companies try to slant it.

I urge you to vote "no" on loosening media ownership rules and "yes" to truly local media.

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FCC Seattle Ownership Hearing – November 9, 2007
Community Partner Statement
Hearing, Speech & Deafness Center
206.323.5770

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

My name is Kristina Williams, Chief Development Officer at the Hearing, Speech & Deafness Center serving 13 counties in Western Washington. I am here representing our CEO Susie Burdick, the Board of Directors, the Staff and the communities we serve. We are speaking in support of KCPQ/KMYQ-TV, Tribune Broadcasting Company. 06-121

For decades, KCPQ has been a strong, supportive and effective community partner with the Hearing, Speech & Deafness Center. We've worked with station leadership on a regular and ongoing basis to educate the community about services available to children and adults with disabilities and to raise awareness about the Center and the issues faced by our clients. The station has produced PSA's for the Center, lent on air talent to emcee fundraisers, provided support through grants and donations, and has always been accessible and responsive to requests to simultaneously serve their viewers and the nonprofit sector.

A strong relationship has developed between our CEO and the General Manager of the station, Pamela Pearson who has served as a business mentor and advisor to the Center's leadership. Ms. Pearson has also spoken on behalf of the Hearing, Speech & Deafness Center as the keynote for a national conference of nonprofits hosted by the Center.

It is clear that the station is about more than just broadcasting. They are involved in and care deeply about their community and the nonprofit sector serving it. This was evident recently when station personnel worked with one of our families in the filming of a PSA. The family consists of the parents and two children, all deaf and Mexican immigrants. The respect, caring, support and quality of interaction between station personnel and this family clearly demonstrated that KCPQ and the Tribune Broadcasting Company have community caring at their core.

They clearly value everyone equally and the deaf staff at the Center, the family, the interpreters and everyone involved felt valued, respected and connected. There is no greater testimony to a business than seeing how their staff interacts with people in need. It was a moving experience that clearly demonstrated the heart of the station and the core values of its leadership.

This community badly needs KCPQ/KMYQ-TV and the Tribune Broadcasting Company. They are part of the health and fabric of who we are, and are known in the nonprofit sector as leaders in corporate philanthropy and partnership.

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FCC Seattle Ownership Hearing - November 19, 2007
Community Partner Statement
Hearing, Speech & Deafness Center
206.323.5770

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NOV 16 2007
Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

06-121

My name is Kristina Williams, Chief Development Officer at the Hearing, Speech & Deafness Center serving 13 counties in Western Washington. I am here representing our CEO Susie Burdick, the Board of Directors, the Staff and the communities we serve. We are speaking in support of KCPQ/KMYQ-TV, Tribune Broadcasting Company.

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Why consolidation of the media short-changes Americans

By Steven Hawley
Principal & Analyst, Advanced Media Strategies LLC
Email: steve@tvstrategies.com

Submitted to the FCC – Docket 06-121 – November 9, 2007

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

06-121

The FCC appears to be in a secretive, headlong rush to relax ownership rules "by Christmas," as detailed in an October 18th article in the New York Times, and later, in the Seattle Times, one of the few remaining independent big city newspapers. Thankfully, Senators from both parties appear inclined to hold the FCC at bay, according to an October 25 article in the industry journal, *TV Week*.

To put a fine point on why this is important, American democracy depends upon a free and open media that helps the public understand the issues of the day and to make informed decisions in elections, not to mention that the media has an impact on public safety. Yet, coupled with the elimination of the Fairness Doctrine in the 1980s, there is less and less assurance that the public will have the information they need. It's ironic that people have to access foreign sources like the BBC and the Guardian to find out what's happening here in the US.

Let's look at a few instructive cases where the media stopped telling the story and became the story:

- As we watch the 2008 round of presidential debates, have you wondered why only the front-runners are being questioned by the moderators, most of whom are employed by large media companies
- When the Space Shuttle Columbia broke up in February 2003, small market radio stations were broadcasting feeds from centralized locations far away. When rural Texas farmers called their local stations, wondering what was falling through the atmosphere, they got voicemail.
- Speaking of space, did you know that the Chinese launched a moon mission on October 23? The American media largely ignored it
- American newspapers and news magazines, including *Time*, ran stories about the British judge who recently found "nine significant errors" in Al Gore's movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*. But they didn't tell the entire story. In fact, the UK's *Observer* reported that the case was brought by Stewart Dimmock, who was supported by the unknown "New Party" of Scotland. The New Party's head, a mining executive, co-authored a 2004 report attacking climate change, with a secretary to Tony Blair and with the George C Marshall Institute, funded by Exxon Mobil. This puts the case in a different light.
- Officials of "Fair and balanced" Fox News in England have all but admitted right-wing bias. Most Americans don't know that Fox president Roger Ailes has been a consultant to the Republican party and advisor to all Republican presidential administrations since the 1970s.

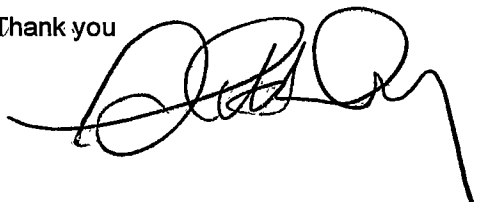
As media companies consolidate, the number of voices in the media declines. As these corporations look for ways to maximize profits, it is well documented that news operations have been consolidated or eliminated altogether. No longer does the media appear to believe that it has an obligation toward public service. The tombstones of the media are dated 1987 (the end of the Fairness Doctrine) and 1996 (with the passage of the Telecommunications Act).

If there was any doubt that the American media is controlling the message (and who is controlling them?), did you know that one of the 2008 Democratic presidential candidates, Dennis Kucinich, introduced H.R.333 on Tuesday Nov 6 (election day!), a bill to impeach the Vice President of the United States?

If you heard about it, you were probably reading a blog or watching CSPAN. None of the TV or radio networks covered it. The Washington Post ran a transcript of Kucinich reading the bill to congress. The Seattle Times actually ran a story. But of course, the Seattle Times is an independent newspaper and its publisher has been vocally opposed to consolidation of the media.

I plead that the FCC reconsider its apparent interest in relaxing media ownership rules, and to not do so.

Thank you



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To the FCC Commissioners

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

Whereas I find that the ~~media consolidation~~^{consolidation} which HAS ALREADY OCCURRED is alarming and appalling, I must urge the FCC to abandon any plans for rules to relax restrictions on consolidation but rather to tighten those rules and force media giants to sell off many of their holding.

The public interest and the public ownership of the airwaves are at stake.

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Thank you,
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Janette Brown; 6039 4th Ave NE; Seattle 98115

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My comment has to do with individual empowerment in democracy and the corresponding importance of a free media. I'm a licensed psychotherapist of 34 years. It's my conviction that when the media is owned by the few and there is not open communication available, individuals become less hopeful.

Whether they maintain a willful, can-do attitude and insist on changes being made like those here tonight, or become angry or depressed is not an either-or situation. Most activists also have their battles with maintaining their activism a pressing forward.

But the control of the media, ~~not~~ ^{No. of Copies rec'd} ~~no~~ ^{1st ABCDE} ~~no~~ ⁰ doubt, is a measure of political oppression in this country. I oppose a few companies controlling so much of today's media. And I support wide spread opportunities for free press, & free broadcasting in radio & television as well as the net. It is one of the most important democratic issues of our time.

8/10/09/07

THE FEW SHOULD NOT RUN THE
MASSES

LET FREEDOM RING!

— KEVIN THOMPSON

(206)405-4486)

06-12)

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NOV 16 2007

November 9, 2007

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

To: FCC Commissioners

From: Seattle Children's Hospital & Regional Medical Center

Subject: BELO Broadcasting's Commitment to the Community

06-121

We have enjoyed a unique relationship with KING 5 and BELO Corporation that allows Seattle Children's Hospital to deliver accurate, informative and valuable health, safety, and injury prevention information to families and the community-at-large. Our partnership enables us to deliver our messages across multiple platforms including TV and online to a broad audience in a cost-effective manner. The BELO stations in this region allow Children's to reach the patients and families we serve across Washington state and other markets in our service area.

Our relationship with BELO has spanned three years. Here are some examples of how KING 5 and Belo support Children's:

- Produce and air TV spots in support of fundraising events, such as Run for Children's and the Symphony Guild event;
- Produce and air one hour Children's HealthLink specials covering pediatric topics such as cancer, orthopedics, transplant and our OR;
- Produce and air weekly Good Growing segments on the KING 5 Morning News on KONG TV addressing a range of pediatric health topics;
- Produce and air weekly Children's HealthLink segments that highlight cutting edge technology and advances in patient care;
- Provide bi-annual research polling to track awareness of Children's philanthropy messages;
- Provide fundraising support for the Season of Light auction;
- Provide on-air talent for Children's fundraising events such as Run for Children's and Season of Light Festival.

Our partnership with KING 5 and Belo enables us to educate and inform a broad segment of our community about key pediatric healthcare topics and generate support for uncompensated care. We hope to continue this relationship for many years.

Sincerely,

Katharine Fitzgerald

Katharine Fitzgerald
Director
Marketing & Communications
Seattle Children's Hospital & Regional Medical Center

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Federal Communications Commission

Office of the Secretary

Section 202(h) of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 requires that the agency periodically review its broadcast ownership rules to "determine whether any of such rules are necessary in the public interest as the result of competition." Section 202(h) also states that Commission must "repeal or modify any regulation that it determines is no longer in the public interest."

It has become obvious by previous rulings of the FCC that this regulatory agency has an abiding interest in promoting the effective consolidation of ownership by large corporate telecommunication entities both within and across the various media. To emphasize this point:

- Currently, six major companies control most of the media in our country.
- Three media giants own all of the cable news networks. Comcast and AOL Time Warner serve 40 percent of cable households.
- The Telecommunications Act of 1996 lifted ownership limits for radio stations, leading to incredible consolidation of radio station ownership. One company alone, Clear Channel Inc., now owns nearly 1,200 radio stations across the country. Before the change, a company could not own more than 40 stations nationwide.

Note: The impact that this kind of consolidation can have on the free expression of ideas and opinions is exemplified by the fact that several large stations owned by Clear Channel briefly banned the music of the Dixie Chicks because of their critical comments about President George W. Bush. Stations owned by Infinity have also banned certain musicians based on their political views.

Given the apparent anti-regulatory and pro-corporate bias of the current administration, it seems quite obvious that whatever rule changes are made will simply hasten the further consolidation of the telecommunications media regardless of the sentiment expressed in this or any other public forum. What makes this particular format particularly dubious is the speed with which these hearings are being conducted and the more obvious fact that we have not been provided with a detailed description of the proposed rule changes. Is this yet another example of withholding information under the guise of executive privilege? It is, in my judgment, a clear indication of the current administration's contempt for the basic rights of citizenship. How can there be true democracy without informed consent that is only possible when individuals have open and complete access to the information required to make judicious decisions?

In conclusion, I would like to remind the members of the FCC that they are servants of all the people and their decisions should not be subservient to the needs and interests of the powerful few, who, after all, represent a very small percentage of the total population. Furthermore, the airways are owned by the American people and must, therefore, serve the public and not private interest. Allowing the communications media to be controlled by a few powerful players does not serve the public and effectively runs counter to democratic principles.

Thank you.

Joseph Aprile
Seattle, WA

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The board of directors of the ten interconnected big media organizations in the US adds up to 118, these individuals sit on the corporate boards of 288 national & international corporations. There are also the military DOD contractors on these media boards. This equals the media Elliot that act as watchdogs of what the public finally sees and hears using hand picked experts that espouse acceptable ideological messages, thus controlling the information content given to the public.

We need media reform. We need a diversity of independent and local media operations. We need to insure a free (non-biased) open media. In a free, democratic nation, the media serves as the fourth estate, a fourth branch of government that protects the people against the abuses of power, political or corporate.

There are basically five top media companies that cover TV, cable and satellite TV.

<u>TV</u>	<u>Radio</u>	<u>Cable & Satellite TV</u>
1. Fox	clear channel	Comcast
a. CBS/Viacom	Infinity Viacom	Direct TV/News Corp.
3. NBC/GE	Entercom	Time Warner
4. Tribune Co.	Cox	Echostar
5. ABC/Disney	ABC/Disney	Charter

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These all are evolved in enmeshed partnerships, joint ventures contractual relations and more. Relaxing media ownership rules to let fewer media giants control more markets. This continued deregulation of corporate media ownership violates constitutional safeguards on diversity, public interest and the capacity to self govern.

Having the majority, if not all, of the media owned by only five Corporate Conglomerates, takes away diversity and needed information that the public gets through television, radio, newspapers and now the Internet (net neutrality). There is no public service responsibility. The airways do belong to the public, but they are not being used for our benefit. There is no public service obligation; they have been tossed out.

Five to ten years ago there were thousands of cable companies now there are three big ones and three mid sized ones (6), and those are owned by the same groups that control the major TV stations, newspapers and periodicals and are now trying to control the internet. 500 channels controlled by the same few. Too much power by a few. Small, diverse operators cannot even knock on their doors; there is no competition.

The deregulation (telecommunication Act of 1996) allowed one company (clear channel) to go from 40 channels to over 1,500, thus exerting unbridled control over the industry. Pay to Play. The deregulation in the early 2000's caused a decrease in diversity in the other forms of media.

Media, for the public interest, should never be concentrated. News Corp chairman, Rupert Murdoch admitted that he used his media for propaganda. It should be called Entertainment Corp instead of News Corp.

This cap lifting (deregulation) will allow networks to legally merge and one company can end up owning all forms of media in a city or several cities.

Democracy is premised on a free press (media), and freedom of the press (media) is premised on the absence of public or private gatekeepers with monopolistic power.

The Supreme Court ruled in 1945 that the antitrust was probably more appropriate in the realm of media than in any other area.

This is not about "Free Enterprise"; these huge conglomerates get enormous direct and indirect subsidies and government-granted monopoly franchises. They get licenses to radio, TV frequencies, cable subsidies and copyrights, only a few things that the taxpayers pay for.

The few hands that control the media have the power to turn lies into truth and truth into lies, without being contradicted, because they also have the power to silence any competing voices. This makes a mockery of the democratic principal of self-government by the people. We are at that junction now. Instead of further deregulation, we need to institute regulations that have already been discarded and have put our Democratic Republic in peril.

Right now, due to the deregulation and the monopoly of the media, instead of learning what is actually going on in the world we get...a veil of distortion, lies, omissions and half truths that obscure reality. Instead of this media that covers for power, we need a media that is objective, critical, covers opposition and unwanted interference. A media that is not controlled by the powerful but speaks truth to power. Investigative Journalism that is not controlled. Corporate, Public Relations firms and Think Tanks give us entertainment and ideology controlled views, not news.

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

I Believe media is
currently too consolidated

There are fewer opportunities
for the public to see
what is happening both
on the local level and
the National level.

We need to hear and
see real news that
is not filtered through
any propaganda or spin
regardless of political
agenda.

Without changing to more
owners — not less — we
will continue to be
misled by inaccurate
and or misleading stories
with no dissenting voices
heard.

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Zendaboss-Hall

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Clyde Hill, WA 98004

Zendaboss-Hall.com

I SAY

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Office of the Secretary

STOP The Corporate Control
of the Media.

YES TO ALTERNATIVE Media

The AIRWAVES Belongs To
we The people
we WANT IT Back

Peace + JUSTICE
now And ALLWAYS

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Alan LOTT
CMT

Seattle WA.
98117

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

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Why outsourcing local media to corporate giants disturbs me.

Seattle is a special place. When we began recycling, within months we were doing best in the US. When we were about to lose the Pike Market to development, local leadership shaped a solution to save our urban jewel. We just achieved our Kyoto pollution goals, the first city to do so. Seattle is special because we work it out. We work it out by interchanges of ideas and concerns in our media by local leadership. We need our local media to foster solutions to the problems facing our city and our region - so we can listen in on deliberations, and add our two cents.

Corporate media needs to lower costs and increase market share - as in any business. Centralized programming and packaging cuts costs. Exciting (sensational?) news sells papers; "if it bleeds it leads" on TV. Civic dialogue and thoughtful exchanges just aren't "hot." They aren't cost-effective, so they're less of a priority for a corporate headquarters elsewhere.

This seems to me to be conflicts of two rights: the rights of citizen to be informed enough to vote intelligently ~~on~~ on matters shaping their lives - and the rights of the free marketplace to have capital flow to its best (most profitable) use.

Local journalists under independent ownership are allowed more space - column inches or airtime - for reporting and commenting on local civic issues. People get treated more like grownups, considering the difficult issues facing any city. If we are addressed as grownups, we start seeing ourselves as grownups. Demonizing opponents is exciting, but it doesn't help a community dialogue.

We have serious problems in Seattle: improving schools, fixing the viaduct, easing traffic without strangling commercial transport, building low income housing and many more. We need to talk out solutions in a civic dialogue, educating ourselves enough to be intelligent voters, to shape our own lives.

I'm afraid that further conglomeration of media ownership headquartered far away will give me a steady diet of Britney's underwear problems and the like - on ALL channels and in ALL newspapers. I'm already sick of it! Don't make it even worse.

Cable and internet news sources don't fill the gap. They further isolate us into separate shared interest groups, rather than a public dialogue of competing civic interests.

Will the rights of money trump the rights of citizenship? I'm afraid so - dammit!

Jeff Strickler
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Testimony of Esther V. John, M.Ed.

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11/9/07 4pm

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views on the crucial issue of media consolidation.

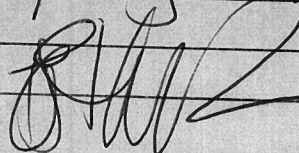
In my opinion, we are at a point in America today when our options for news and opinion are at a nadir. Too few colors in the spectrum of opinion appear on our airwaves and in our press. Too much sensationalism, sexual outrage/titillation and half-truth appears.

Allowing the ^{few} huge media corporations to consolidate even further poses a huge threat to the future of democracy in America.

Only an educated, well-informed populace is able to make informed decisions about self-governance. The elimination of civics education in our public schools partnered with fact- and issue-poor radio and television content will impoverish all but the very wealthy.

I only hope that the Commission is not so cynical as to comply with those who would condemn the many to virtual slavery by keeping us in ignorance.

Please do not allow newspapers, radio stations and TV stations to be owned by single entities in individual markets.



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MEMO

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

Additional Testimony by Gloria John, M.Ed.
1807-13th Ave So.
Seattle WA 98144-4113

Sp 11/9/07

06-121

I'd like to add to my previous written testimony that as an African American and Native American woman, I look forward to a time when the print and broadcast media truly reflect the issues, concerns and opinions of my people.

Media consolidation, under the aegis of mega-media corporate ownership, is anathema to our interests.

The airwaves belong to the people. They are borrowed/rented (at little cost) to parties who would inform and entertain us.

The people want our media back!

Gloria John

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MEDIA CONSOLIDATION IS BAD FOR THE MEDIA
AND A DANGER TO DEMOCRACY.
CONCENTRATING MEDIA POWER IN THE HANDS
OF A FEW POWERFUL INTERESTS RESTRICTS
FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND IS A VIOLATION OF
THE FIRST AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION.

MEDIA ARE GIVEN SPECIAL PROTECTION
UNDER THE CONSTITUTION SO THEY MAY SPEAK
TRUTH TO POWER. CONCENTRATING MEDIA
MAKES MEDIA A TOOL OF POWER RATHER
THAN AN ANTIDOTE TO ABUSE.

MEDIA CONCENTRATION HAS DEGRADED MEDIA.
THE PUBLIC HAS RESPONDED BY ABANDONING
CORPORATE MEDIA IN DROVES. MEDIA CONCENTRATION
IS BAD FOR AMERICAN BUSINESS.

THE SCIENCE IS IN. CONCENTRATION DOESN'T
WORK. THE PUBLIC HAVE WEIGHED IN TWICE.
THEY ARE ADAMANTLY AGAINST IT.

THE PUBLIC AIRWAYS BELONG TO THE PEOPLE
NOT BIG BUSINESS. IT IS THE JOB OF THE
FCC TO MAKE SURE THESE RESOURCES
OPERATE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST.

NOT ONLY DO I BELIEVE THIS ISSUE SHOULD
BE PERMANENTLY TABLED, I BELIEVE
CHAIRMAN KEVIN MARTIN SHOULD BE
REMOVED FOR FAILING TO EXECUTE THE
DUTIES OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE FCC.

THE FCC SHOULD BE LOOKING AT WAYS
TO BREAK UP THE JUGGERNAUT OF
BIG MEDIA THAT IS POLLUTING THE
PUBLIC DISCOURSE. THE FCC SHOULD BE
LOOKING AT WAYS TO NURTURE DIVERSITY
AND FAIRNESS.

Carol Davidek-Waller 0

06-121

QUANTITY VERSUS QUALITY:

Why do Americans have to make a trade-off in radio broadcasting?

-- submitted by Timothy Tattan, Seattle Washington -- ttattan@yahoo.com

I might sound like an 'old timer radio geek,' when I remind us that the old "performance versus promise" requirements of the FCC for a broadcast license renewal. It was a powerful stimulus for broadcasters to compete for how much public service they would actually provide on their airwaves. They had to earn the right to continue to use a frequency every few years.

Now, with the Commission granting new frequencies by auction, the haves ~~get to have it~~ all, since the licenses usually go to the highest bidder.

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The proposal to further loosen ownership restrictions brings up a whole series of connected issues. And it's not without plenty of precedent already operating on the air right now across the United States.

For example, if the unregulated marketplace of just a few licensees really worked to represent a community's interests, why does famously secular and left-leaning Seattle have at least eleven full-time religious and right-wing commercial radio stations on the air right now on the AM band? And yet only one commercial station operates in Seattle with a so-called progressive political format? Certainly it's not because of the demographics of the Seattle market!

It has to be an issue with who is operating the stations. Will Salem or Bonneville ever provide programming by and for the area's Christian liberals? Muslims and Buddhist listeners? Gay and lesbian citizens?

Of course not! It's their mission to control what we hear to suit their owners' political and social agenda, and to make a big profit the only way they know how.

Job opportunities for professional broadcasters and radio journalists are at an all time low, since the number of potential commercial radio employers is now no more than three or four in most major markets -- thanks to the level of license consolidation we already are operating under. Given the reality of the egos in both broadcasting talent and management, this means a lot of potential good radio is not going to happen under the current system that gives one regional manager control over a third of the signals in a market.

New media are opening up new outlets, but few of these outlets can provide a living wage and health benefits. And issues related to internet distribution still threaten to stymie these opportunities in the USA.

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Low Power FM can also serve as an outlet for hobbyists and minority interests. But not at the expense of holding the licensees to full power facilities accountable for broadcasting in the public interest, convenience, and necessity. The whole public.

Now that broadcasters are being given the opportunity to triple their signals with HD radio on the facilities they already control, just how many signals will the Clear Channels and Citicasters and Cumuluses and Disney need in each market to be happy? HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH for these guys?

And the promise of potential news programming from a newly merged newspaper-TV-Radio combo really points out the sad reality that the current radio ownership system won't even perform at the minimal level of public service that it used to 20 years ago - because it doesn't have to anymore.

And if you still think a mega media conglomerate is a good idea, look at Dayton Ohio, where Cox Communications has been granted an exemption to the cross ownership rules for decades. They operate the daily newspaper, the largest TV, FM and AM stations in the market, among others. And they engaged in a deliberate smear campaign against the NPR station in their market when it tried to professionalize and its news audience started to compete with their own. Want to see ugly competition and media rivalries get even uglier all across the country? Just follow the lead the FCC's exemptions have already set in Dayton.

Shouldn't the advent of HD multicasting be the reason for REDUCING the number of licenses any one entity can hold in a market? Shouldn't this open up opportunities for new parties to get into operating radio facilities that the big guys complain they can't make a profit at? Why aren't there any stations operated by the many South and East Asian citizens of metro Seattle? Native American stations? Stations with an authentic voice, geared to the interests of working women? The high tech community? Integrating immigrants into the larger community, while celebrating their culture and languages?

How about using the regulatory power of the FCC to grant licenses for a few more specialty stations with large enough signals to reach their core audiences, who are spread out over our metro sprawl? Not just a promise of a low power signal someday in a suburb.

Vancouver BC, is demographically very similar to Seattle, and has several such stations - including some licensed on the US side of the border aimed at Canada. Why isn't that kind of radio variety happening in Seattle?

Is the broadcast spectrum still public property in the United States?

Hometown radio stations, with their familiar personalities and local news departments, have been re-licensed to larger broadcasters, who have shut them down, and been allowed to move their facilities into nearby, and not so nearby, major markets. The local station everybody relied on is now yet another generic "hit music" station 30 miles away. So much for training grounds for young broadcasters, and so much for the public interest in those cities.

It used to be that the FCC was how we ensured at least a minimal level of public service and accountability. In the past ten years or so, it seems the Commission is beholden more to the interests of large investors, and deliberately makes it difficult for the public to have a say in policy and license renewals.

Even die-hard market force believers suggest that -- at a minimum -- the FCC should monitor and regulate issues of signal interference. Yet when I provide evidence to the FCC field office in Redmons, Washington that Seattle AM stations on 630, 710, 880, 1000 have boosted their sideband interference enough to blot out other nearby signals that we used to receive clearly from nearby Vancouver and Victoria --

I was told by the local field office -- whose phone number, by the way, is unpublished -- that they would not deal with my complaint. I had to deal with it myself with the folks in DC. When I called 1-888-TELL-FCC, after waiting on hold for 13 minutes, I was transferred to an anonymous voicemail box to leave my complaint.

I was even told by a switchboard operator at the FCC headquarters in Gettysburg that I had to contact the offending broadcasters directly, rather than contact the FCC about the signal jamming these stations are causing.

I don't think that's an honest way for the FCC to deal with violations of international treaty obligations for Canadian border stations.

If a large commercial broadcasting conglomerate is complaining about their inability to make a sufficient profit from a pack of fullpower FM and AM signals - then reassign some of those licenses to a non-profit or local organization - or to an eager newcomer to the industry. One that will be able to put public service before shareholder demands, and that will be satisfied with a relatively modest profit - as they try out new programming.

Otherwise, it's just making room for more "classic rock and less talk" in a country that desperately needs media that helps to build communities, civic discourse, and to help us understand our place in the world.

LPFM technical issue:

By the way, the FCC has already licensed hundreds of low power FM stations on second adjacent frequencies in major markets across the country. Licensees such as Calvary Chapel of Twin Falls Idaho, Educational Media Foundation of Sacramento California, American Family Radio of Tupelo Mississippi, Pensacola Christian Church, and other right wing fundamentalist religious organizations found a way to sneak in a national radio service by erecting hundreds 10 and 100 watts facilities, many with high tower heights, all across the country.

Those facilities are causing signal loss to the outer coverage areas for many full power non-commercial stations. One of them even made up a city name of "Cumminsville, Ohio" to licensed as 'first service' for what turns out is only the name on a Cincinnati neighborhood post office -- smack dab in the middle of the Cincinnati city limits.

And these new 'national' religious broadcasters are often targeting the frequencies of nearby NPR affiliates to silence their voices in suburban and adjacent city areas.

These facilities were put on thru a big loophole while the Commission argued about the effect of second adjacent low power FM's. Will the Commission now have the courage to decommission many of those facilities that unfairly compete with locally-based religious stations for listeners and donor support? Or to reassign those facilities to local low power applicants?

It might be ironic that the quality of public service and choices available to listeners have diminished as the number of licensed radio services increases. FCC policies seem blind to the realities of signal propagation, since it grants licenses assuming a flat terrain and does not account for signal realities of hills, mountains, and large bodies of water. Recent policies have diminished FM coverage areas, particularly in the non-commercial band, and made eliminated nighttime DX listening to many major stations from out of town.

Why not regulate the satellite radio band to open it up to both subscription and non-subscription services? FCC regulation, not proprietary hardware, will stimulate this new service if there's room for free "national" services, along with scrambled XM and Sirius channels, on one band.

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